

THE BLOOD-CLOT BOY

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Long ago, there lived an old Count blessed with a faithful Countess and two beautiful daughters. Their family name was *Borofsky*, and they were filthy stinking rich.



Things went smashingly. The idea of having a living relation as far off as Zoog, much less a visitor at all, was very exciting to the old Count, and he remained in high spirits throughout the whole meal, entertaining his guest by cracking jokes, spilling his wine, and speaking incoherently in a language he didn't even know.



Much to the old Count's relief, the stranger accepted the proposal enthusiastically, and though the wedding was a small one, everyone drank heavily, danced, and generally had a very enjoyable time. Alongside his daughters, the old Count gave his new son-in-law the family mansion and his entire fortune to boot; such was his happiness after seven glasses of corn beer that no one, not even you or I, could have stopped him. He and the Countess kept for themselves only a little cottage on the edge of the property, where they hoped to settle into their old age free of worldly concerns, to devote themselves, as it were, to silent contemplation, and the serenity of mind that only provincial living can afford.



Very rich, but very lonely, as they had no living relations to speak of (The Borofskys being the sole survivors of a once vast and prestigious breed of Vordenian shoe-cobblers, dismissed forever in the wake of the great dragon wars of '47) and still fewer friends, having ceased entertaining the cream of Brassafax society after the birth of their daughters, Ruthie and Lucy, some thirteen years ago. Therefore, all the more poignant and exciting for them, when, after so many years of solitude, they were suddenly visited by an odd little man dressed in peasant clothing, claiming to be a long-sundered relative from Zoog (a tiny, one could almost say non-existent province set on the northern coast of the river-Gimby-gim). Though the stranger's physiognomy betrayed absolutely no indication of a classic-born Borofsky, the old Count was willing to overlook this; the visitor exuded such sincerity and smiled so good-naturedly that, relation or not, he couldn't help but invite the young man to take advantage of his hospitality, and, without hesitating, begged him to stay for dinner.

Now, it should be stated clearly that the old Count had always wanted a son; though he loved his daughters very much, he had considerable difficulties in marrying them off, and worried constantly about having a proper heir for his enormous wealth. That evening, in a brief moment of profound lucidity, he struck upon a way to fix this problem that had been nagging a hole in his head for as long as he could remember.

AN! I WILL LET THIS NICE YOUNG MAN STAY HERE AND LIVE WITH US AND I WILL GIVE HIM MY DAUGHTERS TO MARRY AND WE WILL ALL BE VERY HAPPY TOGETHER



At first, the son-in-law was very good to the old couple and often invited them to their old mansion for dinner, which, under new house rule, had become quite an extravagant affair. The old Count was so impressed with the array of exotic food set before him that, on some evenings, he wondered how this young man could afford it all. Then he would recall, in some detail, the events leading up to his present state of affairs, but then instantly forget again, happy to be in the presence of his benefactor, without whom he'd have nothing, and so on.



Things went on like this for a while and, as the story goes, by and by, the son-in-law began to neglect the Count and Countess. Dinner at the mansion became less than frequent, and then stopped altogether; their weekly allowance of food also diminished, and the last basket that the son-in-law sent over was filled with bad fish, rotten meat, and moldy fruit. The daughters adopted their husband's evil attitude and often helped him play cruel tricks on the old couple. They also used foul language when addressing them and, generally speaking, behaved as one characterized by intense ill-will, malevolence, and spite.

One day, the Old Man went out to Cut-Bank Creek and, while foraging for mushrooms (all of which he found were poisonous), he spotted his son-in-law sneaking hurriedly through a nearby field en route to the Sarajawea Forest, a wood famous in those days for having mysterious and transfigurative properties.



Safely hidden, the Count watched as the son-in-law pulled a yak from his sack and plopped it onto his workbench. (A yak, as everyone knows, is a very rare and sacred animal, a *holy* animal, and only two were known to exist during the time of our story. They say that a yak holds many secrets in its blood and intestines, but that only the abbots of Cromwell know how to read them properly.) The Count, who was spying on his homicidal son-in-law and therefore should have been frightened, on the contrary, felt deliciously happy with the thrill of intrigue and suspense that hung around him. The son-in-law, for his part, began to torture the yak by removing its skin very slowly, inch by inch (so as not to miss any "secrets"), until all the countryside was filled with the animal's high-pitched screaming. "*The more you suffer, the better you'll taste!*" hollered the son-in-law, "*The less I spill, the less I waste!*" Finally, after an hour of this nauseating activity (an activity which nevertheless kept the old Count ecstatically riveted), the poor yak screwed up its eyes and died with a feeble hiss. Then the son-in-law carefully cut it into little pieces and put the pieces in his sack and left the workshop.

The Count waited to be sure he was gone, and then examined the abattoir closely for scraps.

All that remained of the murdered yak was a large clot of blood, which the old Count immediately mistook for a liver. He quickly snatched it up and hurried away.



They filled a pot with water anyway, threw the clot of blood in, and waited for it to boil. When the water began to boil, there immediately came from the pot a noise as of a child crying, as if it were being hurt, burnt, or scalded.



Thankless as they were, the twins forcefully and irrevocably broke their parents' heart, and at a time when they were needed by them the most.



Curious, the Count decided to follow him, and after a while, they came to a clearing where the son-in-law had a little workshop set up. The Count could see many things sharp and deadly in this place, such as knives, cleavers, a scimitar, an axe, and some hooks to hang meat from.



It jiggled in his pocket the whole way home.



"Quick, woman! Put the kettle on to boil! I've brought something back from a BUTCHERING!"

"Oh! Our hunting! Well, I daresay it's about time you got us something good to eat! What is it? Is it a squirrel? Oh! What is it? Don't keep me waiting!"

"No-No... I couldn't say... well, here! Take a look! It's actually just a huge clot of blood! Ha Ha!"

They looked in the kettle and saw there a little boy...



They were very surprised.



They quickly took it out of the water and the Countess wrapped it in a warm blanket. The child fell asleep right away, but the old couple stayed up long into the night talking things over. They knew that if the son-in-law found out about the little boy, he would kill it, so they resolved to say nothing and hope for the best. They put the sleeping child in their bed and curled up on the hard floor beside him.

The next morning, however, they wake to find the child had grown to the size of a healthy, eight-year old boy...

GOOD MORNING!

SORRY TO WAKE YOU,
BUT I WAS A BIT HUNGRY,
AND COULDN'T FIND ANY
FOOD ... HOW COME YOU
HAVE NO FOOD TO EAT?

The old couple broke down and told the Blood-clot boy of their sad plight. When Blood-clot heard what the wicked son-in-law had done to them, he became very angry. He did not run off half-cocked to take revenge (as most of us would have), but instead spent a little time with the shaken couple to calm their nerves, as well as to collect his own thoughts, so that he could proceed methodically, simply, and honestly when the time came for him to settle their account.

He waited till nightfall to do this. After the old couple had gone to sleep, he walked over to the mansion and peered in the windows. He could see some figures moving inside, so he went ahead and knocked on the door. Expecting the son-in-law to be a monstrous giant, he couldn't help but laugh when the door opened and there stood before him a little pucker in boxer-shorts, obviously afraid of Blood-clot boy. Without exchanging pleasantries, the Blood-clot boy pushed him back into the house, rolled up his sleeves, and set to work.

Then he turned to the twins and punished them too, for being rotten daughters, and for swearing allegiance to such a scummy blackguard.

Now, after he killed the son-in-law and the hideous daughters, he cut them into little pieces and set the pieces on fire. Then he went about the house and cleaned up the mess they had made. He polished all the furniture, he removed all the red lightbulbs and replaced them with soft yellow ones, he put fresh sheets on all the beds, and fluffed all the pillows. Once everything was in order, he went back to the cottage to tell the old couple the good news.

GO NOW, GOOD
PEOPLE ... GO AND LIVE
IN YOUR MANSION—
YOU'LL FIND THAT ALL THE
EVIL IS GONE, SO YOU CAN
BE HAPPY AGAIN!

AS FOR MYSELF, I
THINK I'D LIKE TO WANDER
A BIT. DO YOU KNOW WHERE
THERE ARE ANY PEOPLE? I'D
LIKE TO SEE SOME PEOPLE!

"Well," sighed the Old Count, sad to see the boy go so soon, "Down where the Moon-river and Killed Creek come together there is a little town. You might find some people there."

Blood-clot assured the Count and Countess that he would be back before they knew it, and then set off for the village.

After two days of tireless skipping, he found the town, but saw no people. In the center of the village there sat a big, brick house sporting a peccant, yet strangely attractive banner...

He instinctively avoided this house and went instead to one nearby, where an old lady lived.

They went inside and the old lady timidly gave him a plate of bad food.

HALLO! I'VE COME
A LONG WAY, AND I'M
VERY HUNGRY! DO YOU
HAVE ANY FOOD FOR
A WEARY TRAVELER?

WHAT ABOUT THOSE
BARRELS FULL OF APPLES OUT-
SIDE? HOW COME YOU
WOULDN'T GIVE ME SOME OF
THAT TO EAT?

"Hush! You will be heard!" said she, and then brought her voice down to a whisper. "That food belongs to the Brownshirts, and they are the lords of this town. They force us to do all the hard work, while they take all the spoil. They will be outside when the sun goes down to collect the barrels — you must leave right away! They will kill you!"

Incensed that a town could have fallen so low as to allow its Grandmothers to be treated so abominably, Blood-clot boy decided that *someone* had to stand up to these brownshirt bullies, and it might as well be him.

The first shirt ran shrieking back into the building and told the others what happened. Soon, the whole pack came loping outside and *boyd* approached the blood-clot boy, who merely chuckled.



He killed all but one, remembering that it, too, was a creature of God, and that if he destroyed it, there would be no more brownshirts left in the world. Instead, the blood-clot boy had him hog-tied and strung up in the public square, to serve as an object for public scorn, humiliation, and ridicule.



Blood-clot was delighted to know that such a creature existed and set off at once. He found the bridge to be quite rickety indeed, and to his immense satisfaction, dangerous as hell.



After miles of twists and turns, loop-de-loops, and just plain good fun, the bridge suddenly and very solemnly dipped into the black water, only to be replaced by a mass of smooth, rounded stones that arranged and spread themselves across the river in a dazzlingly symmetrical and dubious fashion.



He made good progress, but the Sun-River was very large and he hopped for the better part of a day. When the coast-line was faintly in sight, Blood-clot became very excited, tired as he was from the monotony of bouncing from rock to rock. But just at the last minute, when his concentration was at its lowest ebb, one of the rocks rose out of the water in the shape of a head, and opened its terrible mouth, and swallowed the Blood-clot boy whole. The Windsucker had tricked him.



Once inside the Windsucker's belly, Blood-clot saw a fearful sight. The ground was white as snow with the bones of those who had died. There were bodies with flesh on them; some were just dead, and some still living. Those who were still alive looked very unhappy.



*"You who still draw a little
breath, try to shake your heads
(in time to the song), and those
who are still able to move, stand
up and take courage! We are
going to have the GHOST
DANCE!"*



Then he began to dance, singing the ghost song, and all the others danced with him.



The Blood-clot boy jumped up and down as he danced, and going higher and higher, he gathered all the speed of a bullet.



He cut through the base of the Windsocker's brain and burrowed furiously within, killing the beast instantly.



Then he cut through its eye and let all the people out.



They thanked Blood-clot, and told him where he could find more people if he was so inclined. They told him of a town westward of the river, but that he must not take the left hand trail going up, because on that trail there lived a beautiful woman who was always challenging people to wrestle with her. This is what the Blood-Clot boy was looking for. "Ha!" he chirped, "This is my business in the world! To kill off all the bad things!"



"Come here, young man, come here; I want to wrestle with you."

Now, while Blood-clot rested, he saw many large knives sticking up from the ground, partially hidden by flowers and grass. He then understood how the woman killed the people who were foolish enough to accept her invitation.

She called out to Blood-clot again, and this time, knowing her game, he went up to the witch and they began to grapple.



NO...NOT NOW...
MAYBE AFTER I'VE
RESTED A BIT I'LL COME
WRESTLE WITH YOU...

He let her edge him over to the knives, and as they teetered over them, Blood-clot saw his chance and suddenly gave the woman a wrench, and threw her down onto the blades, which cut her body in two.



And so, the deeper he plunged into the haunted forest, the more keenly aware he became of his own purity and goodness. At the same time, however, he was also aware of being pulled to the source of something exceedingly base, that is, something the complete opposite of himself, something utterly ruined in all character and quality, nature and behavior, and so on...

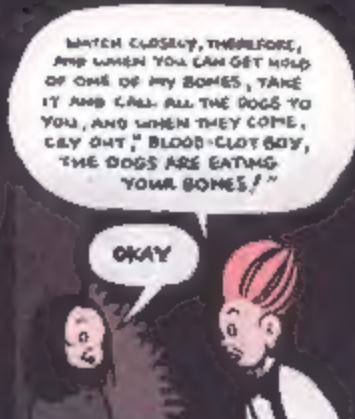
Blood-clot boy went on, and as he walked, the land around him began to grow black and lonely. Occasionally, a night-jitter would flutter against his cheek, or tickle the back of his neck with icy fingers, but he remained calm. A gigantic whorlwind circled over head and began to attune its song to the rhythms of his heartbeat and breathing, but Blood-clot simply blocked his ears. He came to an ancient forest, where the trees tried to stop his heart with garish frowns and unhinged smiles, but he maintained a confident, perky state of mind and continued his promenade beneath their haunted boughs, free from all guile, cunning, and deceit.



By and by, this unknown force revealed itself to be nothing less than the blackest place on earth: the house of the Man-eater. Fun to all men, women, children, and domestic animals.



Across the clearing he noticed a little girl quietly watching him. Sensing that she was waiting for him to do something, he tip-toed softly over to her, and hilariously dead-pan, recited his lines in one clean take:



He went up to the house and knocked on the door. The Man-eater was very happy to see him.



Once inside, The Man-eater took a large knife and went up to the Blood-clot boy and cut his throat. Then he put his body in a big kettle to cook. When the meat was cooked nicely, he drew the kettle from the fire, and ate the body, inch by inch, until it was all gone.

Then the little girl, who was watching closely, knocked on his door and asked him if she could have the bones for her 'starving mother'. The Man-eater bunched up the bones and gave them to her, as if on cue.



When the dogs came, she cried,



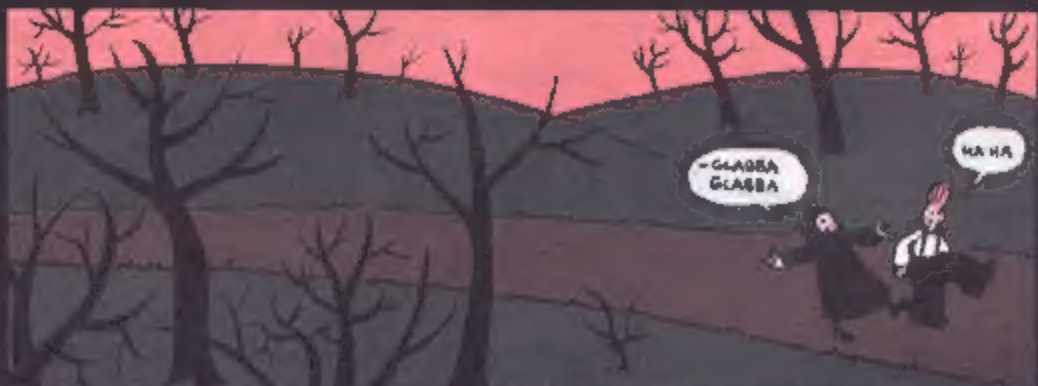
Again, the Blood-clot boy went up to the house and knocked on the door. Again, the Man-eater appeared, this time feigning surprise, and looking a little bored.



Again, he took his knife and cut Blood-clot's throat, and threw him into the kettle. Again, when the meat was cooked, he ate it up, and again the little girl asked for the bones, which he gave her; and taking them out, she threw them to the dogs, crying, "Blood-clot boy! The dogs are eating you!" and again, Blood-clot arose from the pile of bones.

Now, anyone who has gone up against the Man-eater knows full well how this 're-animation' or 'reincarnation' game can be a dangerous one to play, and the odds of ever beating him (it's his favorite game) are pretty slim. The first and foremost reason being his appetite; he will eat you a thousand times if he has to, and he never gets tired and he never slackens his pace. That is why the duel that took place between the Man-eater and the Blood-clot boy is such an impressive one; the details of which are very, very interesting, rest assured, and can be read in any one of the countless volumes of prose and poetry devoted to it.

He and the little girl ended up living happily ever after, having many exciting adventures together...



So, without spoiling the ending for you, let us just say that the Man-eater was the sixth (but not the last) of the bad animals that was destroyed by the Blood-clot boy...

